THE PROBLEMS OF PRIVATE ARCHIVES IN MAHARASHTRA

G. H. Khare

Indian archives can be conveniently divided into two categories; one is the Government archives and the other private archives. Government archives are as a rule deposited in Government constructed repositories and they are managed by Government. Private archives are not to be found, now except in a few cases, deposited in any particular repositories. They are in the houses of old historical families, in the custody of temples and monastaries as well as in *masjids, dargahs,* churches etc. The subject of to-day's symposium is the problem of private archives. I note some of my views and experiences about the same here.

The problem of private records can be chronologically divided into two parts, to wit. Fate of records before 1947 when we won independence and the same problem after independence or more correctly after the enactment of inam abolition act, tenancy act, etc. Before 1947 the possessors of old records firmly believed that, even though they did not generally know the exact contents of the archives they possessed, as the same were in Persian or in old regional languages and scripts, their records might be of immense use for keeping their possessions in hteir own hands, in case there be any suit in law-courts for dispossessing them from their holdings such as *inams, saranjams, watans* etc. They also feared that their records might go against their interests and would prove advantageous to their opponents in law courts. They, therefore, were very conservative in showing their records to even bonafide research scholars and students and would not allow to copy and publish them if required.

But even in that period many families possessed Persian records and as it was practically impossible to get a scholar knowing the decipherment of Persian and old Marathi-Modi documents properly, the owners sometimes showed such records to Persian knowing gentleman in order to know their contents. I can quote one peculiar instance here. In my native town Wai there was and even now is a respectable Brahman family by name Raddi (not Reddi). Rangacharya, a member of that family, had some Persian Adilshahi *farmans.* He had got them deciphered by one Persian teacher from the Satara High School. He deciphered the name of one of his ancestors as Pranasheshacharya and Shri Raddi was at once perplexed as he had never known the name of any person like Pranasheshacharya belonging to his family. He, therefore, came to me and asked me after showing those very *farmans* whether there was any name such as Pranasheshacharya. When I examined the *farman,* I found that the teacher wrongly deciphered the word *pisaran* as prana and therefore Shri Raddi was puzzled. The words, therefore, that were there implied that 'the sons (pisaran) of Sheshacharya'. Thus Shri Raddi's difficulty was solved.

As I know how to decipher Persian records I had an advantage over other research workers. I can quote one instance in this respect. In about 1935, I approached a Deshmukh family with which, it was rumoured that, there were both Persian and Marathi-Modi records. For the purpose of

acquiring them, I had to traverse 8 miles' distance on foot as there was neither bullock cart track even to reach the village where resided the Deshmukh family nor could I hire a pony. When I saw the Deshmukh and asked him about the old records that might be in his possession, he flatly denied that he had any. This Deshmukh was residing in a small state at that time. After a few years the state issued a proclaimation to the effect that all the barren but pasturable land and grass yielding hills belonged to the state. If any body claimed that some such land or hill belonged to him, he should submit documentary evidence in favour of his claim. That Deshmukh possessed such land and hill. He was, therefore, forced to look into old records which he possessed. But he could not decipher them. Consequently the very Deshmukh, who once disowned that he had any records in his possession even after my soliciting him in every way, approached me of his own accord and showed me both Persian and Marathi-Modi records in the hope that his records might contain some evidence in favour of his claim. Among those records I got one letter of Shivaji, the Great, and a few records shedding light on pre-Shivaji period.

But since the inactment of the above mentioned acts after independence, the descendants of old historical families lost their interest in retaining their old records as all the *inams, watans* etc. had been abolished by law and as they could not fight in courts against those laws. In addition to this, after the very sad murder of Mahatma Gandhi, a number of houses of old historical familiies were burnt down by exasperated people and in some cases even instigated by self-interested so called leaders. Hundreds of bundles of old records were thus destroyed in the arson; hundreds of bundles were thrown down by their owners into dungeons and grain-cellars and the papers were turned into mud by white ants. Still there were and even now are a number of families which possess old records both in Persian and Marathi-Modi. The owners of such records are generally inclined to part away with them; but they have not got so much enthusiasm in them as to send those records to the state record offices or repositories of public institutes.

Besides sometimes there appear in newspapers state-notices informing that certain states would like to purchase the old historical records which one may possess for due prices. These notices create a feeling in the minds of such owners that their records might be sold to such states and, therefore, instead of presenting them to a state or a public institute, they correspond with the states that had notified that way. I do not know what had happened to those who corresponded this way; but it serves for the owners an excuse for not parting away with their records. Thus they neither take any care of their old records nor part away with them; and hundreds of records have been already destroyed. Public institutes who are unable to purchase records owing to shortage of required funds loose the opportunity of getting them. But I now quote a very tragic instance in which very important Persian records had been man-handled. In Khandesh there is a Brahman Deshmukh family in which was an England returned barrister. His ancestors were the bazar masters of Burhanpur which was the head quarter of the Khandesh subah in hte Mughal regime. As such he had thousands of sheets on which were noted for each day the daily rates of hundreds of articles that were be sold and purchased in the bazar. Within an hour I could collect a gunny bag of such sheets. I asked the owner of

those sheets to present them to my society. But he was rather unwilling to do that. Once per chance when I met his wife and his daughter, who was working for her Ph.D. degree, I requested both of them to present those papers to my society. But unfortunately there was no response. Then during the last 2 or 3 years, I meet the members of the family and again and again requested them to present those papers. But I could not get success. On the other hand the barrister when I first approached him told me that as a hobby he had converted such records into pulp and made paper-baskets from that pulp. He showed me one or two such baskets. I was much grieved to know this story. But the barrister did not seem to feel shame about it.

One instance of how records were used for transcribing manuscripts had already been narrated by me in my paper, 'A unique find of Adil-shahi farmans' published in the proceedings of the Bikaner Session of the Indian Historical Records Commission (1976). The Second instance is of a manuscript of Marathi *Karna parvan* (No. 25/193) from my institute (B.I.S. Mandala). A number of leaves of this manuscript were made of a long sheet doubled in the middle and pasted lightly. On opening the doubled leaves I found that they contained nine complete and eight incomplete Marathi-Modi letters issued by different commanders of forts in the territory of Shivaji, the Great. The third instance is of a manuscript of Bhagavata found recently with a Badave family at Pandharpur. It has about fifty (50) doubled leaves. On holding them against light I found that on the inner sides of those leaves there is something written in Persian script. I did not get as yet the chance of opening those leaves and examining the writing. But these three instances show that people as well as some repositories may be possessing manuscripts of doubled leaves containing some writing in various Indian languages and scripts. It is the duty of such families and repositories to examine the MSS in their possession and find out if there be such MSS.

One very salient feature of the private archives of all times is that they contain original records actually issued and therefore complete in every respect, i.e. they have the required seals, *tughras,* dated, the names of addressees etc. In Bikaner archives there are *kharitas* and draft *Kharitas.* It is impossible to ascertain from draft *kharitas* whether they were actually issued or not. In the Peshwa dafter of Poona especially in the Satara rajas' and peshwas' diaries there are copies of documents which were issued to various addressees, but there are copies of documents which were issued to ments actually issued. For they do not contain the seals, the full dates, the full names of the addressees etc. I do not know whether anybody has seen the copies of Mughal *farmans* etc. preserved for the official use and whether those copies were complete in every respect. But what I found about Adilshahi *farmans* is that the copies preserved for official use were defective i.e. they were not complete in every respect. On the other hand when we come across original orders such as *farmans, nishans, parwanas, Hasbul-hukams, Rajapatras, Ajnapatras* etc. they are found quite complete in every respect. As such these records are of far more value than the official copies preserved in old state archives. It is therefore the primary duty of file workers in history to collect such documents which are owned by individuals in spite of the copies preserved in old state archives.

In this connection I would like to note a word by way of caution. Sometimes in private archives we come across spurious records, fabricated in the interest of the owners; and therefore we should be very careful while examining such documents though we must collect them. I would like to cite here two instances of such documents. About some ten years ago when I had been to Hyderabad and when I visited the archival office there, Shri Bawa who was then the Director of Archives there asked me to report on some documents which were purchased by the office for rupees 20 thousand from a chief belonging to the former Nizam State. I atonce recognized that there were some Adilshahi Persian documents on which fabricated seals and hands had been impressed, because I have seen hundreds of genuine Persian Adilshahi *farmans* and I have a very intimate knowledge of the Adilshahi seals, their sizes and the legends given in them. In one case I have also found that a seal of one document was pasted very nicely on another document to convince non-bonfide common men that the latter document was a genuine one. I reported the matter to Dr. Bawa who was surprised to find that fabrications were really made. There is still one more very provocative instance. There was one gentleman who stated that he was working as a Collector in a State in the present Madhya Pradesh. He showed me some Adilshahi Persian documents which he tried to justify that they were genuine ones. But I flatly told him that I had seen hundreds of Adilshahi Persian *farmnas*, but I had never seen documents with the working included in his documents. They had no seals and dates on them and they were not in the form in which I have found hundred of Adilshahi *farmans*.

In the end I must exhort the audience, researchers and laymen also, that even against difficulties experienced in collecting records, manuscripts, etc. from families possessing private arcihves, they must not leave any stone unturned in collecting private archives; for if they do not collect them now even though it is already high time, the same will be lost to posterity for ever.